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SWEET NOTHINGS

Memo From MFJ

Sugar has largely escaped criticism over the past two decades. In contrast, in the 1970s, nutritionists (and the Center for Science in the Public Interest, which publishes *Nutrition Action Healthletter*) targeted sugary cereals, candy, soft drinks, and other sweets for contributing to tooth decay, obesity, and empty-calorie diets.

But in the 1980s and 1990s, "demon sugar" was replaced by fat, especially saturated fat. And rightly so. Saturated fat causes heart disease, the number-one killer of Americans. And it may raise the risk of colon and prostate cancer.

While we and others were struggling to cut saturated-fat consumption, the nation's sweet tooth went haywire. In 1984, the amount of sugar—cane and beet sugar, corn syrup, and glucose—sold in the U.S. was about 125 pounds per person. By 1998, despite the increased use of the artificial sweetener aspartame, it had risen to 156 pounds, a stunning 25 percent increase.

What happened? We're eating one-third more candy and we're drinking 40 percent more sugary soft drinks than we did in 1984. Yet we're eating the same amount of fat. Calorie intakes are up and, not surprisingly, obesity rates are soaring.

What's more, sugary foods can squeeze healthier foods out of the diet. People who consume diets high in added sugar get lower levels of fiber, calcium, iron, magnesium, zinc, folate, niacin, riboflavin, and vitamins A, B-6, B-12, C, and E. They also consume fewer fruits, vegetables, and dairy products than people who eat less added sugar. And



Michael Jacobson

soft drinks—"liquid candy"—often push milk aside, and that weakens bones and eventually promotes osteoporosis.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has estimated that the average person eating a *healthful* diet would still have room for ten teaspoons a day of sugar (that's the amount in a 12-ounce soft drink). Of course, the average American is not eating that healthful diet. Yet he or she consumes 20 teaspoons of sugar a day (make that 34 teaspoons for the average teenage boy!).

Last October, CSPI leveled a blast against soft drinks. Now we are asking the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to set a maximum recommended daily intake (Daily Value) for sugar of 40 grams—ten teaspoons. We're also asking the FDA to require all food labels to disclose how much added sugar is in each serving of the food, and what percentage of the maximum daily intake that represents.

To: FDA Commissioner Jane E. Henney
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From: Mrs. Janette Trofimuk
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I agree that all food labels should show the amount of sugar. The risks + consequences of too much sugar should be published.
The consumption of added sugar has jumped 25 percent since 1984, squeezing healthy foods out of the diet. As a member of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), I urge the FDA to establish a "Daily Reference Value" for added sugar of 40 grams and to require labels to disclose how much added sugar a food contains.

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